



JON BRUNING

Attorney General of Nebraska

August 13, 2013

Make Internet Safety Talk a Back-to-School Basic

By Attorney General Jon Bruning

When the summer ends and kids return school, we prepare to send them off with the supplies to ensure a successful year. Today's back-to-school basics include more than pencils and notebooks. Many of today's students depend on computers or electronic tablets for doing homework and socializing with classmates. Because of this, I encourage Nebraska parents to discuss online safety when preparing kids to go back to school.

Cyberbullies

One back-to-school concern for parents and kids is cyberbullying. Cyberbullies use email, instant messages, text messages, social networking sites, chat rooms and/or blogs to threaten and harass their victims. Anonymous communication may provide a sense of bravado for these perpetrators. Online, they can hide behind unidentifiable user names to sling insults, post embarrassing photos or otherwise torment others. Unfortunately, the negative impact for victims is experienced both online and off.

Watch for signs that your child is being bullied. Signs can include avoiding school, withdrawing from friends or family or showing

disinterest in computers. If you think a cyberbully is targeting your child - take it seriously. Parents should report incidents of cyberbullying to website administrators and school officials.

If at any time you believe your child is in danger, report the threat to local law enforcement.

Educate Young Users about Internet Predators

From the beginning of your kids' online experience, you can develop an ongoing discussion about their Internet activity. Explain your expectations about online behavior and make clear guidelines about usage. Encourage your kids to show you the websites they visit. Let them know that if they experience something that makes them uncomfortable, they can safely share it with you. Teach your children about the dangers of interacting with strangers on the Internet and the importance of keeping identifying information safe.

According to the most recent report by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, one in seven kids was solicited for sex online in 2010.

Explain that adults may pose as anyone online, including another child, a friend or a family member. Tell kids never to give identifying information like age, address or school of attendance to *online friends*. Most importantly, they should know what to do when someone attempts to make *real world* contact with them – and they should never agree to meet someone they have only known online.

Educate Older Kids about Real World Impact of Online Behavior

Middle-school kids and high-school students may feel confident about electronic communication via Internet and cell phone.

However, even the most tech-savvy kids can fall prey to online dangers. Social networking sites focus on creating an environment of perpetual conversation, including minute-to-minute sharing of photos, activities and information. Make sure your kids know what information is safe to share - and what isn't. Help them understand that the wrong information shared online can have negative *real world* consequences. Kids should understand that once something is posted online, it's nearly impossible to permanently remove it.

Social networking privacy settings should be utilized, reviewed regularly and set to maximum protection. Phone numbers and addresses should never be posted to online profiles. It's also important for teens to be mindful of posting and tagging photos of friends and family, especially minors. Take the time to review teens' online profiles and lists of friends and/or followers. Alert the website administrator to any unwanted photo-tagging of your kids or other suspicious activity.

Thinking critically about how technology should be used can help to ensure the Internet remains a safe, valuable tool for you and your family. For more tips on keeping your kids cyber safe, go to safekids.ne.gov or visit our website at ago.ne.gov.

###